THE MONTREAL GRAFT ENQUIRY

QUEEN'S
UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY

KINGSTON, ONTARIO
CANADA

OLIVAR ASSELIN

The Montreal Graft Enquiry

Its Funny Side and its Serious Side

Why were the Big Crooks safe?

A Plain Statement by a Plain Writer

(Being a reprint for a few chosen friends of an article in the "Toronto World" on matters about which even the so-called Reform papers of Montreal—habitually and advisedly Peckaniffian—have shown themselves unusually mendacious.)

. . . . For truth is truth
To the end of reckoning.
Shakespeare

85 B. DROLET STREET.
MONTREAL.

November 5th, 1909.

The Montreal Graft Enquiry

BY

OLIVAR ASSELIN

(From the "Toronto Sunday World," with the addition of a few sub-heads for the rest of the eye, and the omission of a few misprints for the ease of the mind.)

The dear Old Spot.

When Royal Commissioner Cannon started enquiring into the municipal affairs of Montreal, a strong stench had been coming out of the City Hall for sometime thru several issues, but public attention centered chiefly on one department. Ever since the invention of the Alderman, the suspicion has lingered in the people's mind that, as the Constitution follows the Flag, Graft will accompany Brass Buttons. This suspicion, a whole chapter of unsavory incidents had developed into a certainty with most Montrealers. A well-known detective elbowed out of office by vain officials whom he did not court and rogues whom he had exposed; a $25,000 police station built by the brothers of Alderman Proulx, Chairman of the Police Committee, under assumed names, and found, after heavy payments, to be ten feet smaller than the plan called for; open carousing by police inspectors with fast women in liquor-saloons, after legal selling hours; and, above all, the manifest protection enjoyed by a number of disreputable resorts — these and kindred facts had spread the conviction abroad that the police of Montreal was rotten. So, there was little else for the Commissioner to do but to begin with the Police Department.

LP
F5012 1909 A8M

The purely administrative deeds were found to be fully as bad as suspected. It came out that the Proulx Brothers, together with a corporal's guard of cousins on both the father's and the mother's side, had a sort of monopoly of the works for the Police Committee. Of course, the Chairman knew nothing of it. Of course, he had never shared with his enterprising kin. Those things, however, having occurred during his term of office, the people could draw their own conclusions — and, rightly or wrongly, they did it.

Of the same Embalmed Beef Brand was the enforcement of the law shown to be. Guilty or not, a liquor-dealer brought to judgment would go to his alderman, or to some alderman, and, thru him, get the Chief of Police to withdraw the charge. This system, the inauguration of which had coïncided with the coming into power of the present chairman, sometimes gave startling results. Some saloon-keepers were prosecuted four times in six months, and released each time without the knowledge of the judge, upon payment of the costs — a paltry six dollars. Over fifty cases were thus abandoned—several of them for the benefit of ill-famed publicans, whose houses, according to the written reports of the police themselves, were nothing short of brothels. Of course, the good Alderman did it all for charity's sake. Some of the culprits were poor. Others had creditors who must suffer from a strict application of the law. In all cases, the guilty saloonist had promised to behave better, and it did not matter how often this same promise had been made, and broken, before. Yet, the chairman of the Police Committee was shown to have got election funds at the rate of $25 to $100 per head from most of these people. Yet, one Cavanagh produced a chèque for $25 which he said he had paid to the chairman for the settlement of a suit, and swore having subsequently spent eight hundred dollars for Ald. Proulx in an election. And so forth.

Brady, the Real Estate Man.

Then a certain Brady was called upon to tell about his relations with Proulx as a gambler. The Gambler is generally a pretty roving sort of a "guy". He will move with police chairmen. The wave of Civic Reform will drive him bither and thither, like the fish that knows enough to run away from warm water when July sets in. The moment some crazy journalist lets out: "Down with the joints!" he will take his shirt-bosom diamond, his cane and his silk hat across the border to some quiet place like New York or Chicago — where honest trade is never disturbed — until the reform wave has receded and he can come back to the shores of his ungrateful city. He seldom burthens himself with real estate. It is too heavy. It is too cumbersome. It is too apt to draw the eye of the Reformer. Add to this that the Gambler has a way of his own of spending money. The sieve of the Danaïds was in reality a gambler's pocket. Brady, nevertheless, came out as a real estate man of the first magnitude. For years he had been employing Ald. Proulx as a notary — for this is the profession thru which Ald. Proulx has acquired all his wordly goods. He had paid him chèques of from five hundred to three thousand dollars at various times, for the discharge of mortgages in the names of friends. Who the friends were, he knew well, but he had lost track of them. He could not tell where they were, and the Commission's endeavors to unearth them proved fruitless. Ald. Proulx' evidence was still less precise. The idea of asking a busy notary to recollect every trifle of a three thousand dollar transaction that goes thru his hands! Regarding appointments, the results were rather meagre. A few people had been told by police officers of hold-ups at a toll-gate, and some others swore to having been held up by Alderman Proulx' professional partner, but denials poured in thick and heavy,

and the search had to be cut short. Neither the Commissioner nor the lawyers saw fit to go into other matters — and according to some, the more is the pity.

A Streak of Virtue.

At first sight, a brass-button looks very much like a brass button. This may be why the Commissioner turned to the Fire Department next. Several things go to make a fire service. There is the Apparatus, the Hose and the Man. Man was taken up first, and here the odd thing was discovered, that while the police had apparently all been appointed or promoted on their merits, the firemen had nearly all paid for their positions. Same aldermen, elected by the same people. Still, all the bribery here and none there. An alderman might be of Tweedite habits on one side of the line, and run business in Cato's own fashion on the other side. It has been pointed out in explanation that every applicant for a job on the police must swear he has paid nothing to get there — so that his lips are sealed henceforth unless he will confess to perjury — while the same oath is not required of the firemen. Be that as it may, why should it be necessary or unnecessary to bribe an alderman, according as he is on the Fire or on the Police Committee?

The St. Eloi Boys.

A handsome "strike" in that department was the St. Eloi firemen's factory. St. Eloi has grown big on the map thru the Montreal civic enquiry. Some men are born orators, others are born railway magnates. The boys of St. Eloi are all born firemen. From generations of "hayseeds", in that small parish of 1500 souls one hundred and fifty miles below Quebec, a sturdy race of men have sprung who will tele-graft a little money to

the Montreal Alderman thru some friend of theirs, come up to the city, and immediately, like Old Centaur on his horse's hips, find themselves seated on the hose-wagon. The fire brigade teems with them, and is, seemingly, none the worse for it. One in a while, when St. Eloi could not meet the demand, a Montrealer might slip in, but the "show" was all for the other crowd. The marvel is that the plough has not yet gone to rust in the fine little parish below Quebec. Eloi has hitherto been the patron saint of goldsmiths. He will have to shift to the Fire Department.

A Difficult Problem.

As to supplies, a horse dealer named Marien testified that he had paid over $5000 in bribes to aldermen and officials, one of the latter — an ex-chief — having received $1500 for his share in the course of eight or ten years. He had given horses as brides. Sixty dollar animals he had been advised to sell for two hundred — and this statement tallied with previous evidence showing that at least one of the horses at the Hochelaga School conflagration, where several children and a teacher perished, was blind. But all the profits went one way, and he had, years ago, ceased dealing with the City Hall. Marien was given the lie by the ex-chief in so far as this gentleman was concerned. Other dealers, still doing business with the department, swore to the honesty of the officials and aldermen, and to the rashness of Marien's charges. The proverbial veracity of the Horse Dealer, added to the proverbial integrity of the Alderman, makes this a particularly perplexing mix-up. Evidently a case of diamond cutting diamond. Over the apparatus the lawyers went rapidly. Petty gifts and loans were shown up, however, and the whole fabric of that department was little more

than a tottering hovel when the guns of the Commission started firing on the Roads Committee.

A Stench from the Sewers and Other Places.

The Marine Department at Ottawa and the Montreal streets are national assets upon the value of which it is useless to dwell. Our greatest Japanese statesman, Hon. Rodolphe Lemieux, said not long ago that the streets of the Canadian metropolis did not compare with Tokio's, nor even with Pekin's. How Jerusalem came to that depth of degradation the enquiry plainly established. The engineers were mere puppets in the hands of the bosses. Patronage was rampant everywhere. The brother of one chairman, Larivière, had built sewers with old brick and with the machinery of the City. This same Alderman Larivière was shown by two different testimonies to have been the dispenser among some of his colleagues of the election funds of the Sicily Asphalt Co., a concern which practically monopolized paving in Montreal for twenty years. Larivière's successor in the chairmanship, Alderman Giroux, had been awarding contracts for hundreds of thousands of dollars to one Rodolphe Brunet, on the highest tender sometimes, never on the lowest. Brunet got the work done by sub-contractors at a profit to him, some witnesses said, of 50 to 75 cents per yard.

"Loan" Furrowers, and Others.

Into the other departments, no regular investigation was made. Just a few peeps into notoriously malodorous corners. It thus came out, with a good amount of swearing to the contrary, that the rock-bottom prices of Aldermanic Conscience were had in the Parks Department, where you could buy three aldermen at the

bargain-day figure of three for $100, or $33.33 plus one third of one cent each; that the head of this or that department had been ploughing his "loan" furrow in silence, borrowing from contractors and dealers alike without ever remitting; that some officials even carried on a quiet blackmail business of their own, asking as much as $2,200 for certain recommendations; that one Lespérance, elected alderman in 1908, had already managed to draw six different charges of boodling on his head; that Alderman Gadbois, once looked upon as a hero for standing alone on the bridge before the Montreal Light Trust like another Horatius Cocles, had got $100 for one vote and attempted to gadboise first one thousand and then five hundred dollars more. This latter fact was sworn to by two well known citizens, and three others sent in their affidavits. And finally, on came that warrior bold, McLea Walbank, General Manager of the Light Trust, with the statement that Alderman Larivière had requested a $10,000 cold cash contribution from him for himself and nine colleagues. This assertion will have to be threshed out in court as the sequel of a $25,000 damage suit. Larivière knows the value of a fair name. It has served him in good stead in the past.

A Trip through Wonderland. Godbout's Pitiful Plight.

Thruout the enquiry, the wonderful and the comic were not lacking. Whole days were spent in Wonderland, to the great delight of the crowd and to the visible bewilderment of the Commissioner.

For instance, there was the case of Godbout, the man from St. Eloi, whose benign mediation had stuffed the fire service with Beotians and "hayseeds." Godbout was kept on the rack day after day to no avail. The oath of a dozen witnesses was against him, but the

cleverest tricks of clever lawyers could not get him to recollect. He would remember yesterday, and the day before yesterday, and practically all that had occurred to him and around him since the beginning of the enquiry, but everything said to have occurred during his connection with the Fire Department had escaped him. Towards the end of his career as a fireman he had had an ankle broken, and, ever since, there had been a blank in his mind concerning previous events. And, stating this, he waved his hand before his eyes in an attitude of despair that made him look an Oedipus without an Antigone. It was heart-rending. Godbout is one of those men who will fall headlong on a stone sidewalk from the top of a church spire, and sprain their big toe. A mass of vibrating molecules. A sort of living telephone; you shout at one end and it rattles at the other end. And, after all, nothing but a fair sample of the extra-fine Boodle Enquiry Witness such as occasionally bobs up at Montreal, at Toronto, or before the Public Accounts Committee at Ottawa.

The Walking Hundred-Dollar Bill.

There was the Walking and Vanishing-at-Will Hundred-Dollar Bill. Fireman Lavallée, looking for promotion, one day walked into the office of Alderman Laviolette, M.D. He swears it was Laviolette, alderman, he went to see. The other chap swears that the call was on Laviolette, M.D. Lavallée swears that, to emphasize his arguments, he left one hundred dollars of paper money in an envelope on the alderman's desk. Laviolette acknowledges having found the envelope after Lavallée's exit. But he had the simple mind and a clear conscience. So well had he disassociated the Alderman from the Physician, and the Ambitious Fireman from the Suffering Patient, for the time of the interview, the idea never knocked even at the back door of his

brain that by some odd chance or thru some deep plotting of the evil spirits there might possibly be a connection between that particular patient and that particular hundred-dollar wad. Several months later, when the news spread that he would be asked to explain, the truth dawned upon him, and he honestly returned the dough — to the doughnor. We have heard of walking cheese, and Hermann has acquainted us with vanishing maids, but the story of this one hundred dollars jumping on the desk of Laviolette, M. D., without anyone's knowledge, is really something new in the world of magic. All the more as the Hundred Dollars was in an envelope and its wings were sealed, so to speak. Laviolette, M.D., has been a well known ward-*healer* in Montreal for thirty years. The number of times he stood for political honors could not be counted. He had the "standing" habit to the bones. As the Conservative party, to which he belongs, had no chance, and he was buried each time under tremendous majorities, the people began to regard him as an inoffensive old man, who should be given a booby prize and made to die happy. With forty seats in the Council there were plenty to go around. There he went by acclamation. And now it is realized that he could not scent a dung-pile when he saw it. Which goes to show that trying to run a city council as a hospital is poor business at best.

A Case for Carnegie.

And there was the Contractor who drew thousands of dollars at a time from the bank and kept the money under his pillow, so that the Alderman could not get at it. Contractor Pierre Leclerc had a house which he wanted to sell to the City for a police station. He sold it for $16,000, and the matter is now known in Montreal as the No. 12 Police Station Scandal — different from No. 13. The value of the property ranged from eight

thousand to twenty-five thousand dollars, as expert opinion goes — for the Real Estate Expert and the Expert Alienist have this in common to their credit, that they never go back on their employer. An ex-boarder at Leclerc's swore that the latter told him of a $3000 bribe. This Leclerc denied. The Bank Book was perused, and here was a chèque for $2000 withdrawn directly the transaction was clenched. "What did you do with the money?" is sometimes an embarrassing query. Not for Leclerc. He first bought new carpets, new curtains and a lot of fine linen at Morgan's—a high-priced house, he added with pride. He gave champagne suppers to his friends — which he explained were costly affairs. He bought patent leather boots for himself. And so on, and so on. But the amount of carpets, curtains, champagne suppers and patent leather boots that is sometimes born of a $2,000 chèque, is truly amazing. Evelyn Nesbitt would make daylight thru it in a day. With all the good will that is in him, a thrifty contractor cannot go at it in the same way. However gay he may strive to get on opera nights, he seldom lets go all his spare cash in one hour for mere pleasure's sake. Leclerc was no exception to the rule. At the end of three months he still had a few dollars left. Where he kept the cash during all that time, the Commissioner was anxious to know. He could not carry it in his pockets, for the bills were small. And he had no safe. So he kept it under the matrimonial pillow, where he and his wife could watch on it in the crime-inspiring hours of night. The servant girl who made up the bed in the morning never touched it. Old boy Carnegie, here is something for you to attend to!

The Pound of Flesh.

And there was Alderman Duquette's tough luck, whom a miserable fireman robbed of thirty dollars of hard-gotten money. A dead-broke devil with an army

of children wanted a job in the Fire Department, and Duquette, so he swears, told him he could get it for $50. Dirt cheap indeed, but the wretch could not put up even that. So — and this portion of the story is corroborated by the third party — it was arranged that the applicant would open an account for Duquette at his butcher's. Now, the ways of Aldermanic Crookedness are tortuous and many in Montreal as elsewehere, but the novelty of some devices will ever tickle the curiosity of mankind. The alderman was getting his due at the rate of fifty cents a week, when the fireman, eaten alive, so to speak, commenced to groan. Gossip got hold of the account. Duquette's meat became food for the rostrum, and the alderman, as a consequence, had to be content with twenty-odd dollars. Needless to say, the dishonest fireman was never promoted and never will be. It would not be surprising, once the present excitement is over, to hear that Duquette has had him arrested for securing a job under false pretences.

The Self-Opening Safe.

And there was Alderman Nault's Self-Opening Safe — a wonder in that world of wonders. Nault is a druggist, and does business on Notre-Dame street. Besides owning much real estate, he is a "patriot". That is, in order to get elected in St. Joseph's ward by a bare majority of French voters, he tells them that the honor of their race requires him to be in the Council. As a druggist, he was put on the Hygiene Committee. And thereby hangs a safe. One Dr. Lafleur, coveting a position in the Hygiene Department, saw Nault, and here is what he swears: The Alderman told him that he could get the job outright; that all he would have to do would be to enter his store at a certain hour on a certain day, go straight to the safe in the back, and place $300 in it. This he did. No witnesses were to be

seen. On the knob of the iron chest a mysterious hand had posted this notice: "You may open, the safe is not locked." Not being appointed, he wanted his money back. Nault virtuously told him to retrace his steps to the back-store and take the money out the same way he had put it in. — This, I repeat, is Lafleur's version. There is a good deal of circumstantial evidence to support it, such as the borrowing of $300 by the applicant at the time of the application. Lafleur is contradicted by Nault under oath, and the question therefore, like the safe, remains open. To what extent the Open Door Policy was practised at the City Hall, we may never Nault. Safes are pretty discrete partners in that kind of work.

A Spurious Jew, and a Bad One.

For plain sublimity, however, nothing in this or any other investigation will ever match Alderman Gadbois' word to Baillargeon the Expressman. A Frenchman by birth, a physician by name, a physical-culturist by profession with the gilding of a newspaper-man on the edges, Gadbois — electorally speaking — has performed the unheard-of feat of out-Jewing the Jew. Of strongly Semitic features, he learned Yiddish, lived in the Ghetto, showed himself in the synagogues, and in a close three-cornered fight got elected to the Council thru the solid support of the Jewish vote. But the trust of Israël he was to betray. What with taking too deep an interest in a certain kind of legitimate wrestling matches, and what with sitting on the Aldermanic Fence to the last in tight divisions, faking and gadboising soon became synonymous for a large section of the community. In June 1906, being a member of the Hygiene Committee, this noble Roman was tricked out of a sum of $500 which he pretended had been promised him by Baillargeon for a stable building permit. Two days after the vote, in he comes to

Baillargeon's, and, in the hearing of five witnesses hidden behind a counter, tells him: "You know I have promised to divide with my colleagues. If I don't get that $500, my honor is gone!"

A Good Judge, but a Narrow Judge.

The investigation has at least effected this, that Gadbois' view of honor is now taken as that of most aldermen. The landslide vote of September 20, involving the cutting down of the Council by one-half and the election by the people of a Public Works Committee, otherwise, tho improperly, called Board of Control, shows which way the tide of opinion has set. It is plain, however, that no serious efforts were made to expose the big crooks. In some respects, the investigation is looked upon by many as a huge farce. They caught the $33.33 Man and and had him pilloried at street corners that the Just might spit in his face, but the impression prevails that among those who assisted in the catch, and shamed the Petty Thief, a closer search would have disclosed five and ten-thousand dollar thieves by the patrol-wagon load. At the time of Cannon's appointment, some sour-dough of a journalist remarked that he could not sentence a man properly to be hanged. He was honest. He really wished the accused to be hanged. But the Court of King's Bench would quash the verdict on numberless counts, owing to his mistakes. He likewise wanted to hang the Crooked Alderman, but turning a city like Montreal inside out, and cleaning all the vermin out of the seams, is a big job, for a former Assistant-Something in a sleepy provincial administration. He tumbled over himself chasing the small bugs, and never saw the big ones.

The Tooley Street Tailors.

In this he was ably, tho no doubt unintentionally, assisted by the lawyers. That small men are fond of

titles is one of the constant teachings of History. If a small-minded judge is appointed to a function where he is to be simply Mr. So and So, it is nine to one that the more "Lordship" you give him the deeper he allows you to penetrate his breastworks. On the other hand, the records of civic investigations will show that any one set of fifty men may assume to speak for the community on such occasions, if they have the high-sounding name and the wherewithal. From the beginning, "His Lordship" Commissioner Cannon's ear was monopolized by the lawyers of the self-christened Citizens' Committee, Messrs. Perron and Laflamme. Any well-meaning citizen should have been allowed to suggest a sensible question. But he who did not come thru the channel of Perron and Laflamme got the cold shoulder, not to say that he was bullied. Old members of the Bar who from the first had come forward with specific charges had to wait six months before they could be heard, and even then, it was hurry-up, you medler, why don't you mind your business! Perron was a law partner to Préfontaine when Préfontaine and Graft reigned supreme at the City Hall. For years he professionally represented interests and men who had perforce to be dragged into the investigation, if the latter was to be thoro. He was Brodeur's choice to assist Cassels when Préfontaine's reputation as Minister of Marine was at stake, and he did not waive the task away. He rose up to the occasion, taking both the job and good fat pay. Laflamme is brilliant, resourceful and enigmatic. Then there was the Committee whose dictates the lawyers were supposed to, and no doubt had to, follow.

An Unpublished Document.

The list of contributors to the Citizens' fund has not been published. It might show whether subscriptions were had from some of the men or companies who should have been put under the searchlight, and were

spared. As between the Provincial cabinet, — under whose authority the investigation was started, and stopped, — the lawyers, the so-called Citizens' Committee and the Commissioner, the responsibility for the course and finish of the enquiry might be difficult to apportion; the more so because the Average Citizen, not seeing the ropes, naively believes there was nothing left to unearth. Whatever the cause, the fact is that you could not touch certain men nor poke into certain transactions with a ten-foot pole. Weeks were spent in discrediting Chairman Giroux and Contractor Brunet, both of them new in their respective parts. But the Sicily Asphalt Company, an old friend of Préfontaine's, was not asked to account for its relations with Giroux' rival, Larivière — and thus Brunet's claim that the English firms were spared, was, notwithstanding the Reform Paper's assertion to the contrary, given some semblance of justification. Gadbois' case dragged on for weeks and would not have come up at all, had not Baillargeon, as a last resort, written direct to the Commissioner asking to be heard, and Mr. Cannon, for once, himself insisted on questioning the witnesses.

Did the Cat come back?

The light and power contracts, known to have been the great source of rot at the City Hall, and which have been lying unsettled for six years, were gone into the last day of the enquiry, after Laflamme had declared that he for one did not want to proceed further, now that the "system" was known. At 3 o'clock p.m., the last day, — that is, one hour and a half before the close, — the cashier of the Forgets, brokers, was ordered to come back at Four with a list of the three-thousand and five-thousand dollar chèques issued by that form during the negotiation of the 1901 street lighting contract. This, Laflamme said, because the lawyers were informed that such chèques had been paid to

aldermen. Did the cashier come back, Posterity will never know. Four o'clock, and no one looked out for him. Four-fifteen, and both Commissioner and lawyers were too deeply concerned in expert horse dealers' evidence to think of the other fellow. Four-thirty — Four-forty — and then the lawyers scratched "His Lordship's" back, and His Lordship scratched theirs, and the show was over. Eighteen aldermen voted for the Royal Electric Company in 1901 and carried the day. Two of them are now judges. One of these two went over to the Royal Company between two votes and gave it the majority. Is it fair to those men to make the Charge, to cast the Suspicion, and drop the Enquiry?

The $33.33 Men, Beware!

The vote of September 20 was something of an upheaval. Some say that, the number of seats being cut in two, the older and more dangerous element in the Council, spared as it has been, will run against the Giroux faction in January next and secure a new lease of power as champions of Civic Virtue.

This is not unlikely.

$33.33 Men, beware!

The 5th day of November, the writer saw fit to add this Post-Script :

Since the printing of the above article in the *Toronto World,* Mr. Laflamme has publicly and emphatically asked for the reopening of the enquiry. That settles his case. The other parties, including the Provincial cabinet, now have the floor. In the meantime, let us note that one of the Reform Papers, "La Patrie", wants the investigation this time to bear on "specific charges" only. Fishing for evidence was all right — for the other fellows.

DATE DUE

A fine of five cents will be charged for each day overdue.

213/39